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LEARNING FROM KING DAVID'S FAILURE

By Jim Newheiser

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The pattern repeated today.

David's mid-life failure continues to be repeated in the lives of many men today. Just as different phases of life present different challenges, circumstances of

mid-life may affect men in various ways according to their personalities. Driven men who are leaders seem especially prone to stumble as David did.

A. They have achieved success in their life's work. The pastor has spent his early adult life seeing his ministry established. He has completed his formal training. His own theology is settled and he has driven out the doctrinal Philistines. No more personal theological journeys or battles are anticipated. The followers of Saul who would have divided the church have been subdued. Perhaps he has seen the church through a building program.

In the same way a Christian businessman may have worked his way through school, landed the good job, and fought his way up the corporate ladder. At the same time he has enjoyed a successful marriage, raised his children, and been active in his church. He owns his home, has put his kids through college, and is saving towards retirement.

A Christian wife and mother may also be tempted. Twenty-five years ago she gave up her career in order to take care of her husband and children. Now her daughter is getting married and her son is going off to college.

There may be greater danger in times of peace and prosperity than in the midst of the battle. Spurgeon points out, It is not easy to carry a full cup with a steady hand, and, smooth places are slippery places.

B. They have reached a plateau and dreams have died. From childhood life is seen as a sequence of ever increasing challenges and opportunities. One looks ahead to completing his education, establishing a career, marriage, and raising children. The horizons continue to broaden. He is always looking forward to the challenges of the next phase of life. As he gets older, for the first time the horizons begin to narrow. Perhaps for some men reality hits in their twenties when they realize their childhood dream of playing in a Super Bowl will never be realized. As he gets older, the limitations become more serious. He is a mid-level manager, but he will never be the president, or even the vice president of the company. Or as a minister, his church is of a certain size, but it has leveled off. He realizes he will probably never be the leader of a mega-church. Nor will he have a national radio ministry or publish a best selling book. He also senses the beginning of a gradual physical decline. He can't run as fast or lift as much weight. Those aches and pains don't go away as quickly as in the past. Nor do the extra pounds he (and his once slim wife) seem to put on all too easily.

After sacrificing her best years to care for her family, the Christian woman may find that not only do her children, into whom she has poured out her life, do not need her any more, but also they aren't living as she taught them. She and her husband have grown apart during these busy years of his career and her child rearing. Now she feels unneeded. What can she do with the rest of her life?

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The seeming termination of the sequence of challenge and opportunity can come as quite a shock to a driven man. What is the next phase to which he can look forward? Is it retirement and then death? Furthermore, as he looks back, he has regrets. Why didn't anyone tell me that my youth would pass by so quickly. Why didn't I realize how soon my children would be gone? Why didn't I make better choices in these crucial phases of life? Why didn't someone prepare me for this mid-life phase? I couldn't wait for each new challenge in life. One man said, I rushed through my twenties and thirties and then when I hit middle age and tried to put on the brakes, I discovered that the accelerator was stuck!

C. Boredom and laziness set in. Just as David could get Joab to fight Israel's battles, the seasoned pastor can meet people's expectations with much less effort. He can delegate much of his work to his assistants or to eager young interns. He can prepare an acceptable sermon in less time, or recycle an old message. Those engaged in vocational ministry have flexible working hours. A driven man can work 80 hours a week (sometimes to the detriment of his family). A lazy man can work very little and go undetected. At this stage of one's career his fellow leaders trust him and don't feel the need to check up on him (just as David's staying behind in Jerusalem when the battle raged, probably went unchallenged). The distractions of surfing the net (where Bathsheeba may be found) can even enable the pastor to give the appearance of working while he is really wasting time.

In the same way, the established businessman can meet his supervisor's (or his customer's) expectations in less time. He has learned how to delegate his work to his underlings. He is trusted by his superiors, and therefore is not held accountable for his time.

The stay-at-home wife no longer has to drive to orchestra rehearsal, soccer practice and ballet. Watching the television, reading the newspapers, or shopping can fill her days.

D. He seeks sinful diversions. A man in mid-life may be able to put much of his life on autopilot and coast, but with the idleness and the resulting boredom will come temptation to sinful diversions such as immorality and covetousness (I Tim. 5:13). Calvin warns, David did not carry out his duty. By thus sparing himself and staying in his house in order to be at his ease, he threw himself into the net of Satan. Spurgeon reminds us that idleness is the mother of mischief, and that David was safer in the midst of raging battles than inside his own palace when he was being lazy.


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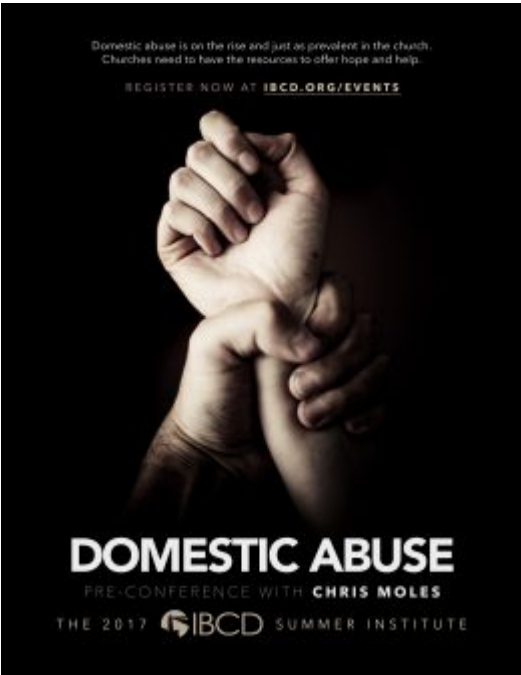
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